



*Advancing the safety, health and prosperity of Hoosiers in the workplace.*

**MITCHELL E. DANIELS, Jr., GOVERNOR**  
*Lori A. Torres, Commissioner*

402 West Washington St., Room W195  
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2751

Phone: (317) 232-2655  
Fax (317) 233-3790

March 11, 2008

CEO of Facility  
Address  
City, Indiana Zip Code

Dear CEO of Facility:

The purpose of this letter is to bring to your attention the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) recent investigation into unexplained neurological illnesses among workers in a swine slaughterhouse in southeastern Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) was notified in October, 2007, of illnesses among slaughterhouse workers and began a detailed investigation of the plant in order to characterize the outbreak. Attached to this letter is a copy of the February 8, 2008 "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report" (*MMWR* 57(05); 122-124) entitled "Investigation of Progressive Inflammatory Neuropathy Among Swine Slaughterhouse Workers – Minnesota, 2007-2008," which details the MDH's investigation and which we are enclosing for your information on this recently investigated health hazard.

As an employer in the pork processing slaughterhouse or meatpacking industry, you may have heard of this outbreak. Employees at the Minnesota plant exhibited symptoms ranging from acute paralysis to gradually progressive weakness, predominantly in the lower extremities, which affected their mobility. As of January, 2008, at least twelve workers had been identified with "Progressive Inflammatory Neuropathy" ("PIN"). The enclosed CDC bulletin provides more detailed information on this disorder and its clinical and diagnostic criteria.

The CDC's investigation is ongoing and final determination and recommendations are still pending. However, based on currently available information, PIN illnesses reported by pork processing employees appear to be closely associated with the use of high pressure compressed air to extract brain matter from pigs' heads. In addition to the Minnesota plant, several employees in an Indiana pork processing plant have also been preliminarily identified as having neurological illnesses similar to the Minnesota plant employees. Based on the CDC's preliminary findings, and, in order to protect your employees we recommend you take the following steps to mitigate any potentially hazardous conditions:

1. If your facility uses compressed air to liquefy and extract pig brain, we recommend discontinuing this practice. As an alternative, utilize manual processing procedures which may reduce the likelihood that employees will be exposed to aerosolized pigs' brain.
2. Ensure that employees, particularly those working in and near the "head processing area," are aware of the health effects experienced by employees in the Minnesota and Indiana pork processing plants.
3. Use barrier protection and/or work practice controls to minimize splatters or splashes of brain material onto employees working in areas adjacent to the "head processing areas." Care should be taken even if your facility does not use compressed air for pig head processing.

4. Ensure that employees use personal protective equipment including gloves, laboratory coats, hard hats, boots, face shield and/or eye protection, as well as any other PPE determined to be necessary to prevent skin and mucous membrane contact with splashes, spatters or aerosolized pig brain matter.
5. Encourage employees to report persisting symptoms that may be indicative of PIN.
6. Seek medical consultation for any employees reporting or exhibiting signs and symptoms similar to those related to PIN cases.

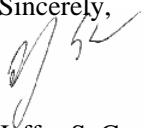
If you need assistance in identifying hazards you may wish to consider hiring an outside safety and health consultant, talking with your insurance carrier, or contacting your state's worker's compensation agency for advice. An excellent way for employers with 250 or fewer workers to address safety and health in their workplace is to ask for assistance from OSHA's free Onsite Consultation Program. This program is administered by a state agency and operated separately from OSHA's enforcement program. The service is free and confidential, and there are no monetary fines if problems are found. Designed for small employers, the Onsite Consultation Program can help you identify both safety and health hazards in your workplace and find effective and economical solutions for eliminating or controlling them. In addition, the OSHA state consultant can assist you in developing and implementing a safety and health management system for your workplace.

In your state, the OSHA Onsite Consultation Program, INSafe may be contacted at:

*402 West Washington Street, Room W195, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204 or by phone at (317) 232-2688.*

OSHA is dedicated to saving lives, preventing injuries and illnesses and protecting America's workers. For more information about OSHA programs, visit our website at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

Sincerely,



Jeffrey S. Carter  
Deputy Commissioner of Labor  
Indiana OSHA  
[www.jecarter@dol.in.gov](mailto:www.jecarter@dol.in.gov)